United Nations DP/2007/25

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund

Distr.: General
23 May 2007

Original: English

Annual session 2007
11 to 22 June 2007, New York
Item 5 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the second regional cooperation framework for Asia and the Pacific, 2002-2006*

Context, background and findings

1. The present document constitutes the response of UNDP management to the report of the independent evaluation of the UNDP second regional cooperation framework for Asia and the Pacific, 2002-2006. The Framework was approved by the UNDP Executive Board in July 2001 and subsequently extended for one year through 2007 in order to synchronize with corporate multi-year funding framework (MYFF) 2004-2007. The evaluation was commissioned by the UNDP Evaluation Office to assess the overall programme performance and outcomes of the second regional cooperation framework. A meta-evaluation of the framework assessed its strategic position, achievement of intended goals and results, performance of policy advice, knowledge management and capacity development activities, synergies and partnerships.

2. The final draft of the evaluation was structured around the customary evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The findings of the draft evaluation have provided useful inputs towards the formulation of the third regional programme for Asia and the Pacific (2008-2011).

3. Management was pleased to note the overall evaluation findings that (a) the second framework programme succeeded, by and large, in addressing vital problems of the Asian region and the Pacific subregion; and (b) the principal directions of the second framework are relevant and have provided a people-centred perspective for dealing with the challenges that the region faces in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Management was also satisfied to note the finding that the framework dealt successfully with a range of new and sensitive areas on democratic governance – such as corruption and human rights – as well as those linked to

* The compilation of data required to provide the Executive Board with the most current information has delayed submission of the present document.

07-35641 (E) 050607

HIV/AIDS, and that at this stage a regional programme had a comparative advantage in tackling such issues. Management further noted the observation that the regional centres established during the second framework cycle have developed well in a relatively short time and have infused new dynamism into the regional programme, being better organized to provide an effective, efficient implementation structure. Finally, management notes the unique accomplishments of UNDP highlighted in the evaluation findings – in the area of anti-trafficking, for instance – as well as valuable knowledge products such as regional Millennium Development Goals reports in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank, and regional human development reports.

4. Management has taken serious note of the issues raised and recommendations made by the independent evaluation. In the annex to the present document, following the standard template, UNDP management presents detailed responses to each of the recommendations and some key issues, and proposes follow-up action with time frame and responsible units specified.

Annex
Evaluation of the Second Regional Cooperation Framework for Asia and the Pacific, 2002-2006
(April 2007)

Evaluation recommendation 1 *The programme should concentrate on fewer objectives, themes, projects, service lines and intended outcomes.* This is a recurrent theme in the outcome evaluations, and it is a key to greater effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.		
Management response: Agree. Conscious efforts were undertaken to concentrate on fewer thematic areas of interventions and projects under the second regional cooperation framework for Asia and the Pacific (RCF II), 2002-2006. RCF II managed to bring down the number of projects to 30, in comparison to 110 projects under the first framework (1997-2001). Further prioritization will be undertaken to ensure a more strategic focus and concentration.		
Key actions	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
1.1 The themes and intended outcomes of the new regional programme document (RPD) for Asia and the Pacific (2008-2011) will be formulated through consultations with the stakeholders (programme countries, UNDP country offices, regional centres, relevant headquarters units, United Nations organizations, regional institutions and civil society) to best respond to the regional development challenges – ongoing and emerging – in Asia and the Pacific. The RPD will focus on the areas of UNDP comparative advantages and strategic priorities outlined in the UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2011. The consultative process permits further narrowing down of the strategic focus and priorities within the framework of the strategic plan in the Asia-Pacific context, informed by stakeholders' participation and ownership.	May 2006-May 2007 (Series of internal/ external stakeholder consultations and discussions, and regional programme document formulation and finalization)	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific(RBAP)/ Regional Support Unit (RSU), regional centres
1.2 Effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of regional programmes will be among the key elements focused on during the project formulation stage, as well as closely monitored as per the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework by the Regional Centres Management Board that includes representation of programme country Governments, UNDP Resident Representatives and Country Directors, UNDP headquarters Bureaux/Units and senior staff of regional centres. In addition, the Advisory Panels established under RCF II with participation of eminent personalities and experts from the region, will continue to guide the work of the regional practice teams. The Regional Centres Management Board reviews and approves the overall annual work plans of the regional centres and the respective regional programmes.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres, Regional Centres Management Board
Evaluation Recommendation 2: *The new programme should have a clearer strategic thrust, informed by the UNDP human development concept and focused on the link between governance and poverty reduction and achievement of MDGs.* This will both contribute to greater effectiveness and raise the profile of UNDP in the region based on its comparative advantage. Concentrating on the MDGs does not provide adequate strategic focus to the programme.		

Management response

Agree on the need to be more strategic in the use of the limited resources in support of regional programme.

However, management is not clear about the statement that "*Concentrating on the MDGs does not provide adequate strategic focus to the programme.*" RCF II was not intended to "*deal with anything and everything that is included in the MDGs*" as the evaluation implies; nor will the next RPD.

Instead, all UNDP regional interventions, identified in the areas of UNDP comparative advantage, will be formulated and implemented so that they contribute to acceleration of MDG achievement in the region through the provision of regional public goods and policy advice at the country level on the preparation of MDG-based development strategies.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
2.1 RCF II focus was guided by the corporate UNDP MYFF 2004-2007 practice areas and service lines which were intended to make the greatest contribution to the achievement of the MDGs and for which there was high demand. In a similar manner, the RPD will be guided by UNDP new Strategic Plan 2008-2011, with sharpened strategic areas of intervention tailored for the Asia-Pacific context, focusing especially on the cross-linkages among programmatic areas such as poverty reduction and governance. The strategic priorities of the RPD will be further narrowed down through stakeholder consultations.	May 2006-May 2007 (stakeholder consultations and RPD formulation/ finalization stage)	RBAP/RSU, regional centres

Evaluation recommendation 3

Concentration and a clearer strategic focus must entail a reduction of themes/practice areas. The environmental theme was curtailed in practice under RCF II and focus on this area may be reconsidered for RCF III in view of the capacity and competence of UNDP vis-à-vis other strong actors in this area. Similar considerations might concern the area of natural disaster risk reduction. Consideration should be given to whether there is a continued need for regional UNDP HIV/AIDS projects.

Management response

Agree on the general recommendation for a more strategic focus, especially related to regional interventions in the areas of environment, natural disaster reduction and HIV/AIDS.

Environment

The scale and nature of many environmental challenges confronting countries in Asia and the Pacific, such as climate change, deteriorated ecosystems, surpass the ability of an individual country's government to fashion viable responses, and therefore call for regional and subregional support for national efforts especially in the presence of cross-border spillovers. Consultations with stakeholders in the region so far have consistently highlighted and confirmed that this area needs regional interventions and solutions. Furthermore, the new resource allocation framework of the Global Environment Facility has greatly limited a scope for regional level initiatives. This gap calls for UNDP continued regional interventions in this area.

Natural disaster risk reduction

Again, the frequency and scale of natural disasters that have hit the countries of the Asia-Pacific region overwhelm the capacity of an individual government to cope, as seen in the case of the December 2004 tsunami disaster. Setting up a regional aid management and results monitoring system enabled the tsunami-affected countries and the international community to track and compare results. Furthermore, UNDP has been acknowledged as a key United Nations organization in early recovery work, which could be facilitated through the development of a regional surge capacity.

HIV/AIDS **It is necessary to continue regional assistance to combat HIV/AIDS for tackling the spread of this disease through cross-border trafficking and the need to assist countries in preparing multi-sectoral responses in the context of MDG-based development strategies.** **In accordance with the global and regional divisions of labour agreed to by 10 United Nations agency partners, at the regional level, UNDP has been assigned the lead role in addressing issues of mobility and trafficking, in mobilizing, channelling and helping coordinate the United Nations system response to the issue.**		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
3.1 The RPD focus will be sharpened in the Asia-Pacific context through the ongoing extensive consultation process.	May 2006-May 2007 (stakeholder consultations and RPD formulation/ finalization stage)	RBAP/RSU, regional centres, Regional Centres Management Board
3.2 *Environment.* In line with the corporate priorities expressed in the strategic plan, and given the magnitude of environment/energy-related challenges in the region, the next regional programme will have a focus on environment and sustainable development, mainly to support the mainstreaming of environmental and energy issues into national development strategies to achieve MDGs, in cooperation with UNEP, other relevant United Nations agencies and regional and subregional institutions. The poverty-environment nexus and energy-poverty challenges will also be addressed and supported, so as support to regional advocacy on climate change and adaptation. Access to carbon financing by individual countries will be supported for improved environmental management and broader sustainable development benefits. Close collaboration with UNEP will be forged in working in the area of environment and sustainable development based on the corporate memorandum of understanding between UNEP-UNDP. Discussions are under way with UNEP Regional Office in Bangkok for joint collaboration.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres, Regional Centres Management Board
3.3 *Natural disaster risk reduction.* Within the corporate priorities identified in the strategic plan, and taking into account a grave need in the region in this area, the next regional programme will have a focus on crisis prevention and recovery, with initiatives for building surge capacity for disaster management, and economic recovery for "building back better."		RBAP/RSU, regional centres
3.3 HIV/AIDS In line with the global and regional division of labour agreed to by 10 United Nations organization partners, and in response to the growing need in the region with one of the fastest growth rates of HIV infection, the UNDP regional programme intends to continue to work on HIV/AIDS, focusing on the issues that are distinctly regional, such as cross-border trafficking and multi-sectoral responses at the country level.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres

Evaluation recommendation 4 *If macro-economic and trade issues are kept in the programme, the relevant competences require strengthening.* The issues are clearly relevant for poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs, and the human development perspective is important. But UNDP faces an uphill struggle to become recognized as a qualified actor in a field dominated by actors with established credibility and large resources, such as the World Bank, ADB and UNCTAD.		
Management response Agree. In order for UNDP to best assist the programme countries of the region, especially least developed countries and low- income countries, to develop and implement MDG-based national development strategies, it is imperative to strengthen the in-house advisory capacity in the areas of macro-economics and trade, while maximizing the benefits of synergy and complementarities through strong collaboration with other United Nations agencies and regional institutions, especially the development banks.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
4. Building on the current work under RCF II, the capacity and expertise on macro-economic and trade at the regional centres will be enhanced through the regional programme 2008-2011, by placing competent and trained staff specifically in the context of support to the work related to the MDGs in the region, focusing on initiatives such as regional integration and South-South cooperation.	2007-2011	Regional centres
Evaluation recommendation 5 *The programme must strike the right balance between supply (strategic focus) and demand (the changing needs of the region).* In the past – RCF I – the programme was primarily supply-driven. It has moved towards becoming more demand-driven, and that has enhanced its relevance and effectiveness. But there is a risk of becoming too demand-driven and thus losing strategic focus.		
Management response Agree.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
5.1 The areas of regional intervention in the next regional programme 2008-2011 will be determined specifically to strike the right balance between strategic focus and demand of the region with changing needs.	May 2006-May 2007 (stakeholder consultations and RPD formulation/ finalization stage)	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
5.2 The overall balance between supply (strategic focus) and demand (changing needs of the region) will be guided by the Regional Centres Management Board (see above, key action for item 1). While ensuring responses to demands, the next regional programme will keep its focus on UNDP comparative advantages and strategic priorities outlined in the strategic plan, which will be further narrowed down through consultation with regional stakeholders. Supply to create demand at the country level will be undertaken for sensitive areas such as human rights, human trafficking, gender, transparency and accountability and carbon financing.		RBAP/RSU

5.3 Some resources will be set aside to permit rapid response to emerging needs in the region.	2008-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
Evaluation recommendation 6 ***There must be a better balance in the programme between the basic production of knowledge products and more capacity development, advocacy and policy advice.*** **This will lead to better utilization of the many qualified outputs and hence greater effectiveness.**		
Management response **Agree. Corrective measures have been taken to address this issue. For instance, the flagship publications and knowledge products of RCF II, such as the regional MDG reports in collaboration with ESCAP and ADB, and the regional human development reports, have been widely utilized for capacity development, advocacy and policy advice at different levels.**		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
6. Further efforts will be made on this recommendation through implementation of the regional programme 2008-2011. In particular, the knowledge management team based in the Bangkok Regional Centre, together with other practice area teams, will work closely with UNDP country offices to help disseminate the regional knowledge products at the country level and explore ways to apply and translate them into concrete programmes at the country/local level for capacity development, advocacy and policy advice.	**2008-2011**	**Regional centres**
Evaluation recommendation 7 ***The regional programme should be better linked to the country programmes.*** **The weak linkage between the regional programme and the country offices is a recurrent theme in the outcome evaluations. The relevance and effectiveness of the programme can be enhanced if the country offices become more involved in programme planning (through consultation) and in using the knowledge products for capacity-building, advocacy and policy advice.**		
Management response **Agree. Measures have been implemented to establish a stronger regional-country programme linkage, as seen in a number of regional projects such as the Regional Energy Programme for Poverty Reduction, the Pacific Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, and the Regional HIV/AIDS and Development Programme.** **Furthermore, a number of specific arrangements have been put into place to ensure stronger linkages with UNDP country programmes in the region. These arrangements will continue and be enhanced during the next regional programme:** **(a) Formulation of programmes/ projects through consultations with the focal points at country offices;** **(b) Endorsement of programmes/ projects by programme countries and participation of government representatives in the Regional Centres Management Board;** **(c) Approval of regional centre annual work plan and annual reports by the Management Board, which comprises UNDP resident representatives and country directors in the Asia and the Pacific region;** **(d) Provision of policy advisory support to the country offices and the countries by regional programme staff. Thirty per cent of the staff time is currently devoted to this country office support/policy advisory function, to be increased to 40 per cent in the new regional programme.**		

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
7.1 For the next regional programme, 2008-2011, the projects will continue to be developed in full consultation with the Country Offices.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, Regional centres, Country Offices
7.2 The work of regional centres and regional programmes will be guided by the Regional Centre Management Board represented by Governments and UNDP Country Offices (see above, key action for item 1).	2008-2011	Regional Centres Management Board
7.3 In addition, policy advice on country programming by regional programme specialists will receive greater emphasis	2008-2011	Regional centres
Evaluation recommendation 8 ***The programme should concentrate on projects that measure up to the regionality criteria.*** **Having too many projects and activities that are not truly regional dilutes the programme and distorts its profile. It is important that the programme concentrate on issues and modalities that are regional in character.**		
Management response Agree. In fact, for approval, all the RCF II projects have been examined for regionality criteria in terms of provision of regional/sub-regional public goods, managing cross-border spillovers and externalities, exchange of experience and knowledge sharing.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
8. The approval process for programmes in the next RPD will place stronger emphasis on the need to satisfy one or more regionality criteria.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
Evaluation recommendation 9 ***The gender dimension must be mainstreamed in the programme.*** **In spite of recent attempts to strengthen the gender dimension, it remains a weak point. In view of the crucial importance of the gender dimension for poverty reduction, human development and achieving the MDGs, mainstreaming should be accorded high priority. It will be necessary to strengthen the gender competence (more gender specialists) in all three regional centres.**		
Management response Agree on the need for strong focus on gender equality. This is an area where conscious and concerted efforts have been undertaken regionally to further overall gender equality and mainstreaming through a regional gender programme as well as with the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Regional Gender Steering Committee.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
9.1 The next regional programme will continue to provide resources to a dedicated regional gender programme that addresses key gender equality issues, while enhancing gender mainstreaming in all regional initiatives.	2008-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
9.2 The programme will focus on gender equality (supporting region-wide campaigns to reduce and prevent gender-based violence), promotion of gender-sensitive policies, preparation of national gender mainstreaming strategies and incorporation of the goal of gender equality in MDG-based development strategies.	2008-2011	Regional centres

9.3 Gender considerations will receive priority in all regional programmes. A precondition for approval of regional programmes will be benchmarks on impact on gender. To ensure gender equality and track the status of gender mainstreaming, indicators will be built into the results and resource frameworks of each regional initiative.	2007-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
9.4 The Asia-Pacific Regional Gender Steering Committee and the Regional Centres Management Board will monitor and ensure progress of gender mainstreaming.	2008-2011	Asia-Pacific Regional Gender Steering Committee, Regional Centres Management Board

Evaluation recommendation 10

It is necessary to strengthen monitoring and evaluation. **The lack of an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework with baselines, benchmarks and indicators makes it difficult to monitor the progress of projects as well as the entire programme. An improved monitoring and reporting framework will also strengthen the foundation for reviews and evaluations. Thus it is both a management tool and an instrument for better documentation of results.**

Management response

Agree. This challenge is applicable throughout the work of UNDP organization-wide. Without a robust corporate monitoring and evaluation framework, with credible baselines, benchmarks and indicators, the results of regional-level intervention will be difficult to measure. Measuring development outcomes derived from regional programmes/ projects (and attributing them specifically to UNDP support) is even more complex for UNDP, as UNDP increasingly focuses its work on United Nations-supported programmes at the country and regional levels. A special effort will be made to measure 'drivers of change' and establish direct causal link.

Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
7.1 Despite lack of common corporate monitoring and evaluation framework for UNDP regional programmes, the RPD will establish clearer, more practical and measurable benchmarks and indicators to monitor the progress of the regional projects. A monitoring and evaluation framework will be formulated to enhance greater development effectiveness and enable better evaluation of results. This will include the mandatory outcome evaluations, required reporting and audit.	2008-2011	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
7.2 Moreover, the Regional Centres Management Board will monitor and oversee the regional projects and work of regional centres.	Annually from 2008-2011	Regional Centres Management Board

Evaluation recommendation 11

The regional programme and the regional centres should catalyse closer cooperation with other United Nations organizations based on a clear division of labour. **Building on the United Nations aim of 'delivering as one', UNDP must find its new role in closer cooperation with other United Nations organizations. The regional programmes provide important opportunities for furthering this agenda**

Management response

Agree on the need for strong partnership with other United Nations organizations. The regional programmes have embarked on joint activities and collaboration with other United Nations organizations so as to deliver as 'One UN' at the regional level. MDG-related work at the regional level will continue to be undertaken in partnership with ESCAP and ADB. Collaboration is also forged with ExCom agencies through the Regional MDG Initiative programme to support roll-out countries in the preparation of MDG-based national development strategies. ExCom agencies have undertaken joint missions with the regional MDG Initiative team to the roll-out countries and are working together to sharpen the technical methodologies. Collaboration is ongoing with ILO through the poverty programmes and similarly with UNAIDS, UNIFEM, UNEP, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, OCHA, and OHCHR through other regional programmes.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
11.1 In the context of United Nations reform towards 'Delivering as One,' much stronger emphasis will be put in the next regional programme 2008-2011 on working with other United Nations organizations, to avoid duplication and maximize impact. Systematic effort will be undertaken to pool human resources from all the organizations for work on MDG-based national development strategies, with ILO on employment/decent work agenda, UNEP on the poverty-environment nexus, UNIFEM on gender, WTO/UNCTAD on trade, UNAIDS on HIV/AIDS, and UNCDF on inclusive finance, in areas of comparative advantages. Existing corporate partnership agreements and memorandums of understanding will form the basis of the partnerships.	2008-2011	RBAP, Regional centres
11.2 Through enhanced collaboration with other ExCom agencies (e.g., through Regional Directors Team meeting), joint efforts will be made to strengthen knowledge networking and sharing, and media training at the regional level. Efforts will also be made to pool the regional technical services of different organizations. A regional 'solution exchange' knowledge management platform is being established, along with a common roster of the pool of expertise available through different organizations for referral services.	2007-2011	RBAP through ExCom Regional Directors Team, regional centres

Evaluation recommendation 12

There is scope for closer collaboration with regional institutions, but it must be selective, focused and based on a clear division of labour. **The cooperation with ADB can be intensified. Support to ASEAN must be more selective and focused, based on UNDP priorities. The cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat on the monitoring framework for the Pacific Plan may be considered exemplary.**

Management response

Agree on the need for close collaboration with regional institutions. In fact, under RCF II, UNDP forged and enhanced strong partnerships, for instance with ESCAP and ADB on the MDG-related regional projects, and with regional organizations such as ASEAN, SAARC, Pacific Island Forum, Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Tumen River Secretariat, etc. Partnerships have also been developed with the Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre and other non-governmental organizations, academia, regional think-tanks, and the private sector.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)
12. Partnership-building beyond United Nations organizations will be strengthened in the next regional programme, with international financial institutions, regional organizations, civil society and private sector.	2008-2011	RBAP, regional centres

Evaluation key issue 1 The evaluation notes that the RCF II projects have been affected by 'budget cuts' following the establishment of regional centres in Bangkok and Colombo and the subregional centre in Suva.		
Management response It is misleading to state that the establishment of the regional centres resulted in a sudden reduction of funds, and the establishment of the regional centres was costly. No regional project budgets were cut. The rationale for establishing the regional centres was that while there would be an initial fixed cost, with time, the consolidation of projects scattered throughout the region will lead to significant economies of scale in overhead costs, while providing for a concentrated critical mass of expertise in different practice areas. This is what resulted, as can be seen in the increased delivery in 2005 and 2006 (average $18 million per annum), compared to average delivery of about $7 million annually from 2002-2004 (prior to the establishment of the regional centres). Hence, the impact of the establishment of regional centres should be seen over the entire RCF II time horizon. The resulting economies of scale have brought down the share of management cost.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
Efforts are being undertaken at the corporate level to finance the core posts of the regional centre management from the corporate biennium regular budget, which will help to reduce further the management cost of the centres.	Ongoing	RBAP/RSU, regional centres
Evaluation key issue 2 The evaluation report subsumes sustainable development under poverty or governance, not treating it as an independent cluster.		
Management response The evaluators introduce a new clustering of programmes into 4 areas (poverty, governance, HIV/AIDS and subregional cooperation). While it is agreed that the weight given to programmatic clusters changed in the course of implementation of RCF II, the main programmatic clusters as per the approved RCF II document remained the same. Although funding provided to the 'sustainable development' area was not in tune with the magnitude expected in RCF II, there was still a substantial programme in the area of sustainable development, and omission of this area in the clustering of programmes can give a distorted picture of RCF II.		
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**
In line with the strategic plan, and given the scale of the development challenges in the region related to environment and energy, the new RPD for Asia and the Pacific (2008-2011) will have a dedicated focus area on environment and sustainable development, as mentioned earlier in the key actions under recommendation 3.	2008-2011	Regional centres